

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dear Editor,

It's the 200th anniversary of The Bill of Rights, and what is the American Civil Liberties Union doing? In San Francisco, they are threatening a feminist organization with legal action to silence their political speech. Yes, that's right, the same folks who brought you the free speech rationale for defending the Nazis, the Klan and the pornographers, including child pornographers, are bringing you the threat of silencing explicitly political feminist speech because they have been . . . well, it seems they've been offended.

Always Causing Legal Unrest, whose acronym is ACLU, has parodied the American Civil Liberties Union in political leaflets and buttons. In particular, it has parodied the American Civil Liberties Union's version of First Amendment doctrine by which, mindless of political context and power, it defends the political status quo by championing those who perpetrate abuse in the name of speech. In response, the American Civil Liberties Union has written a letter threatening to invoke the power of the state to suppress political speech in order to put an end to the parody of their organization.

Always Causing Legal Unrest, founded by long-time feminist activist Nikki Craft, who co-conspires with Tara Baxter, speaks to the rage that women feel at being raped, incested, beaten, sexually harassed, turned into pornography, and generally assigned subhuman status at home, at work, in the courts and legislatures, on the street, everywhere. It breaks the most respected social taboo — the taboo against acting on, expressing, or even consciously feeling, rage and hatred at men who abuse women. Always Causing Legal Unrest is working in the tradition of the Sandinistas, the Intifada, the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, Jews who resisted the Holocaust, and every other serious political movement that has considered taking up or has taken up arms to get the big foot off the necks of the people. They urge women, who know violence so intimately as it is used against us, to imagine and talk about using violence to defend ourselves and retaliate against our abusers. Imagine violence — how can we help it, it's in our dreams, our fears, our fantasies, in movies, magazines, books, billboards. Violence is in our lives, as what has, will or might be done to us and those we love. Talk about violence — as something other than men's weapon against us. Imagine violence — as something to make us fearsome rather than fearful. Consider using violence, and decide for yourself whether and under what circumstances you'd use it.

Women loved Thelma & Louise. What woman, particularly one of the 92.2% who have been sexually assaulted or harassed (statistic from Diana Russell's random sample of 930 San Francisco households), doesn't feel a gleeful flash of freedom at the thought of doing a rapist in instead of being forced to follow his order to "suck my cock"? Most of the mainstream, male-dominated media hated it. They couldn't condone the violence — against men, for once, and the (tut, tut, ladies) suggestion of man-hate. But *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down* is brilliant, *Blue Velvet* is profound, *9 1/2 Weeks* is philosophically compelling, and *Fatal Attraction* and the plethora of movies showing women insulted, demeaned, beaten, raped, slashed and killed are just good entertainment.

What has piqued the American Civil Liberties Union so that it has threatened governmental intrusion into political speech? Is it Always Causing Legal Unrest's advocacy of the idea that women consider using violence that is routinely used against us? Is it women using the language of physical and sexual violence that is routinely used against us? Or is it only that women have dared to use, raising the specter of "disparaging" or "arnishing",

the ACLU acronym? Some things, the American Civil Liberties Union apparently believes, are worth suppressing political speech for, like an acronym, like interests in a trademark. Other things, like the struggle against anti-Semitism and racial violence, like the struggle against the Klan and the Nazis, like women's equality, women's bodies and sexuality and women's human dignity, are so insignificant — or so threatening — that the American Civil Liberties Union blithely labels and defends as speech acts of systematic oppression against them. Some people's acts of systematic oppression, the American Civil Liberties Union believes, like the Nazis, the Klan's and the pornographers, are worth protecting as speech. Women are worth silencing. What happened to the American Civil Liberties Union's trademark "more speech" as the answer to all our woes? What about their characteristic: "In a democratic society, having the press free from governmental intrusion is essential. Anytime you tie the hands of the press, you tie the hands of democracy." They forgot to add: ". . . unless you mess with the ACLU acronym, and then we'll invoke the power of the government to tie and gag you faster than you can say 'Bill of Rights' twice backwards." Why is the American Civil Liberties Union not advocating on behalf of Always Causing Legal Unrest, which has been censored from the press?

Yes, that's right, the same folks who brought you the free speech rationale for defending the Nazis, the Klan and the pornographers, including child pornographers, are bringing you the threat of silencing explicitly political feminist speech because they have been . . . well, it seems they've been offended.

The Northern California branch of the American Civil Liberties Union in San Francisco has threatened to sue to suppress speech. On the heels of the Gay Olympics case in San Francisco, civil libertarians should be particularly sensitive to the threat to use trademark laws to suppress political speech. The law of the relationship between First Amendment rights and the protection of trademarks is a developing area. Guess what — it's not political revolutionaries, not even liberals, who are championing trademarks over the First Amendment. Why is the ACLU, and not for the first time, on the side of the most conservative values, values that protect property, profit and the powers that be, and that threaten and undermine politically disenfranchised people? The irony, the outrage, of the American Civil Liberties Union taking a stand antithetical to its stated free speech principles on this emerging area of First Amendment law as it affects women is glaring. What is really going on here? Whose Bill of Rights is it, anyway? Whose interest is the American Civil Liberties Union representing?

Write to Dorothy M. Ehrlich, Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, 1663 Mission St., Suite 460, San Francisco, CA 95741. Demand an explanation. Protest their threat to bring down the government on a feminist organization that is daring to publish daring political speech — whether or not you agree with what it says. And send a copy of your letter to Always Causing Legal Unrest, P.O. Box 2085, Rancho Cordova, CA, 95741-2085.

Sincerely,

Penelope Seator
December 15, 1991

"For Immediate Release," signed Penelope Seator, December 15, 1991.

For Immediate Release

Press Release Signed Penelope Seator - December 15, 1991

This two-column press release appeared on the reverse side of the Bill of Rights Day leaflet distributed by Nikki Craft and seven other women at the ACLU fundraiser in San Francisco. It is preserved here as a standalone document because its political analysis and organizing purpose deserve to be read in full and on their own terms.

The Press Release

Addressed "Dear Editor" and signed Penelope Seator, the statement begins by asking what the American Civil Liberties Union was doing on the two-hundredth anniversary of the Bill of Rights. Its answer is that the organization was threatening a feminist group with legal action over political speech while presenting itself publicly as a defender of civil liberties.

Women's Political Speech and Institutional Free Speech

The argument moves beyond the acronym dispute. It contrasts the institutional prestige granted to speech by Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, pornographers, and child pornographers with the treatment of women's political speech about rape, pornography, sexual harassment, battering, and female rage. The release asks whose bodies and dignity can be treated as insignificant while the speech claims of powerful men and industries receive institutional defense. It documents a recurring boundary in free-speech practice: women's speech is often classified as trivial, improper, threatening, or unlawful before the principle of free expression is allowed to apply.

An Organizing Instrument

The press release was designed to produce further action, not merely explain the dispute. It asks readers to write Dorothy M. Ehrlich, protest the threatened legal action, and send copies of their letters to Always Causing Legal Unrest. The document therefore combines analysis, public pressure, and movement communication in a single printed form.

Relationship to the ACLU Document Family

ACLU-03a should be read with ACLU-03, the decorated "Happy Bill of Rights Day! But there must be some mistake..." leaflet front. The two pieces were originally printed as opposite sides of one leaflet, but they are preserved as separate archival entries so that each can be studied independently. ACLU-04 contains the official police report documenting the confrontation that followed at the event.

Source and Provenance Note

The source is an original photograph supplied in 2026. The image preserves the complete two-column press release, its "Dear Editor" opening, its call for public response, the Penelope Seator signature, and the December 15, 1991 date. The source image is included unchanged in this folder.

Content Note

The press release discusses pornography, child pornography, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, battering, and violence against women. It uses confrontational radical feminist political language characteristic of the period.

Prepared for the Nikki Craft Archival Project.